

Lewis Hine's Photographs

BY BILL BIGELOW AND BOB PETERSON

PROponents of corporate-driven globalization argue that adhering to principles of “free trade” will solve the world’s economic ills. As former U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick claimed: “The global trading system has demonstrated, from Seoul to Santiago, that it is a pathway out of poverty and despair.”

However, history shows that what actually makes people’s lives better is

people themselves working to *make* them better. Thus it was not the magic of the marketplace that greatly reduced the incidence of child labor

in the United States, but organized efforts to stop it.

Lewis Hine, a few of whose photos are reproduced here (with his original captions), was one such social justice activist. Hine’s startling photographs of children at work were not the product of mere

Hine’s startling photographs of children at work were not the product of mere curiosity, but were part of an anti-child labor campaign.



Lewis Hine

“Little girl spinner in Mollahan Cotton Mills, Newberry, South Carolina.” (Lewis Hine, 1908)



Lewis Hine

"Boys going home from W. B. Conkey Co., Hammond, Indiana." (Lewis Hine, 1908)

curiosity, but were part of an anti-child labor campaign. In 1908, Hine left a teaching position to work full time as an investigative photographer for the National Child Labor Committee, which was fighting against the exploitation of children at work. His first photo essay of child laborers was published in 1909. It would be many years before legislation would be passed eliminating some of the most egregious types of workplace exploitation of children. But what is certain is that change occurred because people worked for it.

Hine's photos can be viewed today as artifacts of one important struggle for social justice.

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Lewis Hine

"Woman and girl kneeling while preparing embroidery thread as two children and another woman watch." (Lewis Hine, 1912)

The Night Before Christmas

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

In this poem, written by a social worker in 1911 in New York City, a privileged child talks with her doll—a doll that was made in sweatshop conditions in a tenement where the family who made the doll lived.

Lewis Hine, the American photographer who took thousands of pictures of children at work, printed this poem along with a photo of the Cattena family of 71 Sullivan Street in New York City. The family was making dolls' legs. One of the children, Rosalie, is disabled; one is named Nettie. They all work after school and often until 10 p.m.—and not only during the Christmas rush.

Dolly dear, dolly dear, where have you been?
"I've been in a world you have never seen."
Dolly dear, dolly dear, how came you there?
"I was born in a tenement, up a back stair."
Dolly, my dolly dear, what did you see?
"I saw little children make dollies like me."
How old were these motherkins, when did they play?
"They don't play in that world, they work every day."
Dolly, but dolly, how long does it take?
"They nodded, we nodded, that night half awake."
Why didn't they feed you and take you to bed?
"The children who made me were often unfed."
Dolly, but dolly, what were they named?
"There was Nettie with measles, and Rosalie lamed."
These sick little children, what could they sew?
"They stitched on my dresses, an arm then a toe."

“The Night Before Christmas”

Lewis Hine photographs and poem, author unknown

THIS POEM CAN BE USED AS A MODEL for a dialogue poem. (See the Rethinking Schools book, *Rethinking Our Classrooms, Volume 1*, p. 128; for other examples, see p.152 in *Rethinking Globalization: Teaching for Justice in an Unjust World*.) In a dialogue poem, two characters talk to each other or about the same events or issues from different perspectives. Photos of child workers or sweatshop laborers can be used to inspire poetry writing. In pairs, students examine the pictures and then write a dialogue poem—between a boss and a worker, between a child worker and child student, between a poor child and a rich child, etc.

Students might pattern a poem after “The Night Before Christmas” and have a more privileged child talk to an object and wonder about the child behind the product.

Have students choose one of the Lewis Hine photos and write an interior monologue from the child’s point of view. (More photos can be found in Russell Freedman’s *Kids at Work: Lewis Hine and the Crusade Against Child Labor*; they can also be found online.) Ask students to imagine: What is s/he thinking and feeling? Why is s/he at work? What hopes does s/he have?



“Manuel the young shrimp picker, age 5, and a mountain of child labor oyster shells behind him. He worked last year. Understands not a word of English. Biloxi, Mississippi.” (Lewis Hine, 1911)

Lewis Hine